

Ravenel (H. W.)

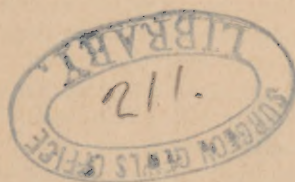
1882.]

Botany.

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McC R's report

H. W. R.



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GENERAL NOTES.

BOTANY.

GORDONIA PUBESCENS L'HER (FRANKLINIA ALTAMAHA MARSHALL).—This tree, so far as I can learn from the records, has not been found in the uncultivated state since 1790, when Dr. Moses Marshall saw it near Fort Barrington, on the Altamaha river, in Georgia.² It was first discovered by John Bartram in the course of his travels (as botanist to the king) through the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida in 1765. His son William, then only a lad,

²See his letter to Sir Joseph Banks, p. 563, in Darlington's "Memorials of Bartram and Marshall."

accompanied his father in his travels. Afterwards, in 1773, William Bartram undertook, in the interests of Dr. Fothergill, of London, a journey through the same region. His book of travels was published in London in 1794. He states that he found it as he journeyed southwards in the summer of '73 near Fort Barrington, where he had seen it ten or twelve years previously as he traveled with his father. After concluding his travels, which extended as far west as the Mississippi, and occupied several years, he returned to Fort Barrington in the autumn of 1778, to collect and send off seeds, roots, etc., of such plants as he had seen in his way. He there found it again in mature fruit, and states that he saw "two to three acres covered with the tree." The seeds collected by the Bartrams were distributed in this country and in Europe, and the trees growing from these seeds are all that we have left of the original discovery a hundred years ago.

In March last I was requested by Professor C. S. Sargeant, who is in charge of the Forestry Department of the Tenth Census work, and also agent for the American Museum of Natural History in New York, to make an effort to rediscover the long lost tree, wood specimens of which were wanted to complete the series of forest trees of the United States for the Government, and also for the museum; to investigate its habits in the wild state, and to learn more of its geographical range. For that purpose I made a visit to Darien about the middle of March. At that time my only guide to the locality was the simple reference in our botanical books—"found at Fort Barrington, on the Altamaha." I supposed at first it was to be sought for in the river swamp, but on consulting ~~Mr.~~ Bartram's Travels and learning more of the topography of the country I became convinced that it was not in the river swamp, it was to be looked for but in the flats and pine land branches.

Barrington stands on the north side of the Altamaha and about 16 miles from Darien, where the river has bluffs on its northern banks, thus throwing the whole swamp on the south side. The road from Darien, the same as it was a hundred years ago, passes mostly through damp, flat pine woods, until within about three miles of the fort, where commences a succession of dry and rolling sand hills, which extend up to the river. The site of the old fort is still to be seen, with its ditches and embankments marking the outlines. It retains the old name, and is now known as one of the ferry crossings of the Altamaha river.

I went up to Darien in company with a friend, traveling the same old road which the Bartrams and Marshall had used. We made diligent search on the way, but could not find it. This season of the year was unfavorable for the search for an unknown tree, as leaves, flowers and fruit had all disappeared. During the summer my friend, who has good knowledge of the flora of that region, went up three times—in June, July and September—making careful examinations along the road and the flats and

branches near by, but failed to find it. He saw an abundance of *G. lasianthus* and *Pinckneya pubens* in bloom, but the object of our search could not be found. I made a recent visit to Darien in November. We went together again, making the fifth visit to the supposed locality. The following paragraph from William Bartram's account of his discovery of this tree furnishes the clue by which I was guided in my search. After detailing the events of his journey southward from Philadelphia to Darien he says: "I set off early in the morning (from Darien) for the Indian trading house on the river St. Mary, and took the road up the north-east side of the Altamaha. I passed through a well-inhabited district, mostly rice plantations on the waters of Cat Head creek, a branch of the Altamaha. On drawing near the fort I was delighted at the appearance of two beautiful shrubs in all their blooming graces. One of them appeared to be a species of *Gordonia*, but the flowers are longer and more fragrant than those of the *Gordonia lasianthus*."

Now this paragraph gives a clue to the situation. 1st. As he journeyed from Darien, it was, of necessity, *on the north side of the river*; 2d. "As I drew near to the fort." This is ambiguous, and may mean a few hundred yards, or even two or three miles, in a ride of 16 miles; 3d. The tree was evidently *in sight from the road, and probably not far off*, so as to be readily seen by any one passing that way; 4th. It was growing in company with another showy, flowering shrub. This other flowering shrub was most probably *Pinckneya pubens* (which was finely in bloom in June and July when my friend went up). The only other showy, flowering shrub which I saw in that region was *G. lasianthus*, and as Bartram knew that very well, the probability of its being *Pinckneya* is increased.

Now about two miles from the fort, and just at the commencement of the sandhills, the road passes between two pine land branches within 40 or 50 yards on either side, spreading out into flats which approach almost up to the road. Here was an abundance of *Pinckneya* on both sides, in fact the principal growth, and also the *only specimens seen from the road between Darien and the fort*. I suppose, at a rough estimate, there may have been "two or three acres covered with the tree," as ~~Mr.~~ Bartram states. They are so near the road, and so conspicuous when in bloom, as to arrest any one's attention, and especially one who was looking out for new plants. All the indications seemed to point to the spot as the one where the *Franklinia* was discovered. If, as I suppose, *Pinckneya* was the accompanying shrub, it reduces it almost to a certainty, as we saw *Pinckneya* nowhere else on the route. We stopped here, and my friend and I made a close and exhaustive search on both sides of the road. We saw plenty of *G. lasianthus*, and I gathered seed vessels of *Pinckneya*, but *Franklinia* was not to be seen. After satisfying ourselves that it was not

there we rode on towards the fort, and then returned from the fifth unsuccessful search.

Whilst in Darien I met Mr. Cowper, a son of Hon. J. Hamilton Cowper, who was well known some forty years ago among scientific men for his culture and refined hospitality, and for the great interest he took in the natural sciences. Mr. Cowper informed me that his father had collected in his grounds all the trees and shrubs indigenous to that section of the country, but *did not have Gordonia pubescens* among them; that he himself had been hunting for it for several years past, having been up frequently to Barrington looking both in the river swamp, on the south side, and in the woods and branches on the north side. I also heard whilst there that a collector of seeds from some Northern house had come on from Florida to hunt for the *Gordonia* near Barrington, and that he was also unsuccessful.

What are we to think of all this? The two Bartrams and Moses Marshall saw it 100 years ago, without any doubt, for the trees growing from the seeds which they distributed give conclusive proof of its existence at that time, and in considerable quantity, in that locality. Since then it has been lost, even to the people of that region, and, as far as I can learn, has never been seen elsewhere. Was it confined to that single locality, and has it become extinct? This supposition is scarcely admissible without very strong proof. I confess I am at a loss for any explanation of its disappearance. I have thus given a minute and detailed account of my unsuccessful efforts, in the hope that it may assist any future explorer to solve the mystery of, *Franklinia altamaha*.—H. W. Ravenel, Aiken, S. C., Jan. 6, 1882.

